

WASHI: Japanese Paper in Collections Outside Japan (Budapest, 5–6 Nov 2026)

National Museum Conservation and Storage Centre (OMRRK), Budapest, Nov 5–06, 2026

Deadline: Aug 20, 2026

Mirjam Dénes, Budapest

International Conference // WASHI: Japanese Paper in Collections Outside Japan – Research, Diagnostics, Preservation, and Conservation.

Organised by the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts and the National Museum Conservation and Storage Centre, Budapest, in connection with the exhibition Washi – The Thousand Faces of Japanese Paper, held at the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts from 25 September 2026 to 31 January 2027. The project is supported by the Japan Foundation, Grant Program for Japanese Studies Projects.

Theme, Objectives, and Scope

WASHI: Japanese Paper in Collections Outside Japan aims to establish a sustainable interdisciplinary framework for the study and preservation of Japanese paper-based objects in Hungary, the broader Central European region, and cultural institutions both in and outside Japan. By connecting Japanese Studies, art history, conservation, and material diagnostics, the conference seeks to strengthen professional knowledge, encourage international exchange, and create a regional knowledge hub for institutions caring for Japanese paper collections outside Japan.

Washi, traditional Japanese paper, inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is a material of deceptive simplicity. Composed of bast fibres from plants such as kōzo, mitsumata, and gampi, it possesses physical and chemical characteristics distinct from European wood-pulp or rag papers. In the context of Asian art, washi is not merely a substrate for imagery: it may function as a structural component, a binding material, and often as an object of art in itself.

European collections hold a vast number of Japanese paper-based artefacts, ranging from books, woodblock prints, handscrolls and hanging scrolls (kakemono) to folding screens (byōbu), manuscripts, maps, albums, stencils, and ritual or everyday paper objects. However, a critical knowledge gap remains in many institutions outside Japan. European conservation curricula have traditionally focused on Western paper traditions. Consequently, many museums and collections lack the specialised expertise required to diagnose biological degradation, mechanical damage, or chemical deterioration specific to Asian papers and mounting structures.

Furthermore, most small- and medium-sized museums cannot send objects to Japan for traditional hyōgu mounting or conservation. This leaves a significant part of Japanese cultural heritage outside Japan in a vulnerable position: stored in conditions often designed for Western artworks, handled within institutional frameworks not always adapted to their material needs, and some-

times affected by earlier repairs that may prove damaging in the long term.

The conference aims to bridge the gap between high-level Japanese expertise and the realities of European museum collections. We ask: How can institutions outside Japan maximise the lifespan of these fragile artworks using available resources, advanced diagnostics, preventive conservation, and chemically compatible minor treatments, without necessarily requiring full-scale intervention in Japan?

The programme will include keynote lectures by invited specialists, including Kyoko Kusunoki, Senior Conservator for Japanese Paintings at the British Museum's Hirayama Studio, and Yoan Rosenzweig, conservator specialising in Japanese and East Asian paintings, and founder of Shōendō. Their expertise connects Japanese conservation traditions, Western museum practice, and the adaptation of Japanese methods to collections outside Japan.

The conference will combine scholarly papers, institutional presentations, a roundtable discussion, and guided visits to the OMRRK facilities and the Washi exhibition at the Ferenc Hopp Museum. The current programme structure includes thematic panels on case studies, regional perspectives, advanced research, and methodology.

Call for Papers

We invite proposals from conservators, conservation scientists, curators, collection managers, art historians, historians of material culture, Japan specialists, and early-career researchers. Proposals are invited for 20-minute papers addressing aspects of the main themes listed below:

1. Materiality and History

The physics and chemistry of washi; fibre identification; the interaction between paper and added materials such as adhesives, mica, pigments, dyes, and metal leaf; historical and regional varieties of Japanese paper.

2. Advanced Diagnostics

Non-invasive and minimally invasive investigation methods applied to Japanese and Asian paper objects, including microscopy, XRF, multispectral imaging, fibre analysis, pigment identification, and damage mapping.

3. Conservation Case Studies

Successes, challenges, and failures in treating Japanese paper in Western climate zones and institutional contexts; minor treatments such as patching, hinge repair, humidification, or flattening; decision-making between stabilisation, partial intervention, full remounting, and non-intervention; the use of washi in the conservation of non-Japanese objects.

4. Collection Management

Storage solutions, environmental monitoring, handling, transport, light exposure, rotation, disaster preparedness, and long-term preservation strategies for Asian paper collections.

5. Exhibition and Research

Displaying Japanese paper-based objects; balancing access and preservation; communicating material knowledge to visitors; exhibition-based research; and the interpretation of Japanese paper objects for audiences outside Japan.

We are especially interested in contributions that examine Japanese paper objects in collections outside Japan, and in papers that reflect on the practical, methodological, and ethical challenges of working with such materials in European or other non-Japanese institutional contexts. Case studies from museum, library, archive, and private collections are welcome, as are broader theoretical or methodological reflections.

Proposals focusing on Korean, Chinese, and other non-Western papers will also be considered, particularly when they address comparative material, conservation, diagnostic, or collection-management questions relevant to the broader themes of the conference.

Papers may present completed projects, ongoing research, diagnostic results, conservation case studies, treatment histories, collection surveys, or exhibition-related research.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit the following materials in English:

An abstract of ca. 300–400 words, in MS Word format, containing:

- the title of the proposed paper
- a clear statement of the research question, case study, or conservation problem
- a brief indication of methodology, sources, objects, or diagnostic/conservation methods used
- an explanation of the proposal's relevance to the conference themes
- name and institutional affiliation
- contact information
- brief biographical note of ca. 100 words
- any special presentation requirements

Presentation Format

20-minute papers followed by discussion.

Important Dates

Abstract submission deadline: 20 August 2026

Notification of acceptance: 31 August 2026

Publication of full programme and registration details: 1 September 2026

Conference dates: 5–6 November 2026

Please submit abstracts and required materials to: washi@hoppmuseum.hu

Subject line: WASHI 2026 Proposal – [Your Name]

Travel, Accommodation, and Fees

At present, the organisers are unable to guarantee travel or accommodation support for speakers selected through the Call for Papers. Should additional funding become available, limited support may be considered for graduate students, early-career researchers, or speakers without institutional funding.

There will be no conference fee for selected speakers. Registration fees for non-presenting participants as well as registration fees for accompanying events, such as workshops, will be announced together with the final programme.

Accessibility

The organisers are committed to making the conference accessible to all participants. Please contact the organisers regarding any accessibility needs, dietary requirements, or other accommodation requests.

Conference Organisers

Dr Györgyi Fajcsák

Director, Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts

Mirjam Dénes

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Date: 5–6 November 2026

Venue: National Museum Conservation and Storage Centre (OMRRK), Budapest

Building C – Bródy Zsigmond & Adél Event Space

Address: H-1135 Budapest, Vágány utca 4, Hungary

Conference language: English.

The conference will be held in person.

Reference:

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